

Duck Notes:

General Daily Routine (Above 50F)

In the morning, every morning without rain, the duck's area including the coop is rinsed with enough clean potable water to make certain that the ducks have a clean area to roam. Following this they receive their morning feed. Currently, 8/16/2024, ducks receive fresh water for the day regardless of weather. This includes their wading pool, which is rinsed and refilled. As long as the temperature is warm (above 50F) ducks are also rinsed (daily shower) with special attention given to their feet (flippers). Ducks are also given additional feed in the afternoon (around 6 pm), when water and cleanup are done again, as needed.

Waste management:

Special care was taken to add plants both in and around their habitat to absorb waste and prevent downstream contamination. Waste is diluted by virtue of rinsing the habitat each morning, and both color and amount of feces production is noted as well as the amount of food eaten by the ducks. They root in the mud, and wet their food so the water is darkened almost immediately and must be changed daily if not more frequently. This is much 'cleaner' than water they would consume in the wild. Concern about water chlorination and egg production is why it's not done twice daily, but multiple separate water choices are provided to the ducks. They have access to 5 different water sources to lower the likelihood of any contamination from bacteria, and with the daily shower and wading pool, the flock has been very healthy, so far.

Duck Forage:

Duck's food consumption is dependent primarily on the temperature, and foraging varies due to ground water. For example, on warmer weeks, the ground is harder, and they may eat less earthworms and simply graze lightly on the chia, sage, mint, and lemon verbena in their habitat. They also have access to a wider area which includes additional shade and has clover as well as grapes and cherry trees. Therefore, the full area of the combined habitat is approximately 575 sq feet. This provides approximately 64 sq feet per duck (5 hens and 4 drakes). They prefer to stay closer to their coop, except for overnight when they wander the whole area. This seems to be limited to overnight foraging. I have noticed they don't eat grape vines or cherry, but might forage on clover, chia, weeds, or bugs that would otherwise be pests in the garden.

Feeding and Behavioral Notes:

These ducks love red roses, and will eat them, presumably to provide vitamin C, but they don't eat the yellow roses in their habitat, even though that plant is right next to their food and water. They have clean straw on which to lay, but haven't learned how to use it properly yet. The straw is rinsed each day, and replaced as needed. Frequency of replacement is dependent upon need and so, this would be about once per week, mainly because they don't stay on the straw, but wander around at will. At 5.5 months old, all ducks can fly, but they choose not to. I can infer that they are happy with their surroundings,

and feel secure enough to lay in the open.

There were initially 10 ducklets, but one duck was lost to an eaglet when they were 2 months old, at which time, action was taken to help prevent further predation. A mirror and wind chime were placed in the open part of the coop area. This is essentially a 'scarecrow', and has proven to be effective. The ducks are not alarmed by their reflection, and seem to be more calm and secure since 'their flock is larger', but predators are deterred by 'competition' for prey.

It is notable that this breed is known for skittishness, but they have been trained to move at my direction to a different area as I rinse the habitat. A few seem to like the shower and will move toward the water, but most of the flock just sees it as something that happens when the coop gets cleaned.

Duck nutrition:

Ducks are given a medium protein, high calcium and niacin feed each day, but how much they eat changes both on the weather, and available forage. They also get some additional chopped vegetables, and particularly appreciate kale. This preference is interesting since kale provides additional calcium which they need for the eggs. Chia seed and plants have been added to their diet over the past few weeks, since both are very good sources of niacin and protein. Chia is notably easy to grow, and requires little upkeep beyond the initial few days of watering.

Habitat notes:

Regarding their habitat and the plants added to help with runoff, a grate was added to collect and dilute waste and direct it into the flowers. Flowers contain 6 Roses of Sharon, which will also provide a wind break over the winter and additional shade in spring and summer. The red rose they ate was transferred to a pot and placed into the run-off area, but the plant isn't likely to survive, since they ate the buds following the potting. There is also a faux well with a roof, their coop, and a small pine tree for shade. Proximity to the house and porch seems to deter predation, but may be less effective in winter. For this reason, it will be necessary to add additional screening to the top 'windows' for the coop and take care in where straw is placed, since mice or other animals may decide they want to take advantage of the warmth. Ducks can eat mice, but I don't know if they will.

Thoughts on further dietary changes:

Such a strong preference to this plant makes me wonder if the flock might appreciate an additional source of vitamin C. Regarding that preference for rose, they have a tomato plant in the habitat, but don't seem to like tomato fruit. They ate the Hostas that were in the habitat garden, and Hosta also contain vitamin C. They have been given chicory, and do seem to like it, but not as much as they love the red rose.

Nutrition and duck coloration:

Colors of ducks are perfect for the breed, with 2nd molt having occurred and sexual coloring successfully achieved by the drakes. Their markings are

actually quite vibrant for the breed, chocolate runner duck, which doesn't really have a great deal of difference between males and females. In relation to the laying habits, I have started a journal. I also note that the smallest hen seems to spend more time in the sun than her peers. She started laying yesterday with a single egg, and today she laid 2. I wish there was a way to do a chemical analysis of their eggs, but for now I am limited to physical examination. The 1st egg will be preserved, and eggs 2 and 3 will be compared to a typical, similarly sized chicken egg.

Eggs:

Eggs are collected within 8 hrs of laying, and then rinsed in clean water, dried, and placed in cold storage (refrigerator). A daily record of laying for each hen will be kept, both to keep track of productivity, as well as to verify the overall health of the hen. Pictures of eggs will be taken weekly for comparison. At this time 3 eggs of standard medium size have been laid by the smallest hen.

Health note:

All 3 eggs have strong shells, which are mottled blue green and have a moonlike appearance. The first egg was rather pointed, but the second and third are more rounded in shape. This indicates a faster laying process for the hen, and that she is having an easier time of it. She has put them in an area where she knows I will find them, which is interesting. In all likelihood, she may know that these eggs are infertile. Since she is early to lay at 5 ½ months old, the drakes may not be able to fertilize them yet since they are not expected to lay until age 6 months. All 3 eggs were cold to touch on collection, indicating that she didn't try to hatch them.

Mira Behn

8/16/2024

Notes:

8/19/24

Missy is doing great! As of today, she has laid 8 eggs. With the majority at or over 38g. Color continues to improve, with more uniform coloration, ie less mottling and scratches. *Reupped the straw today, along with regular rinsing. Also refilled pool. Noticed water got muddier despite double rinse yesterday. I blame the rain we got. It was just enough to make the area muddy, but not enough for rinse, Also demucked the screen in the grate for good water flow into garden.

8/20/24

Added a little bit of straw to Missy's favorite spot, under the verbenia. She rewarded me with 2 very nice eggs today! 43g and 47g with nice shells and even colors. One egg is lighter blue than the other. Shape was nearly perfect on both eggs. Shows she is feeling more comfortable during the process. Also a good indicator that food and water are adequate. She has 2 drakes that are following her around consistently. No conflict between any of the ducks indicates sex ratio is correct, and they have adequate space. The fact that it's 2 of the drakes means the rest of the hens aren't quite ready to lay yet, since there are 5 hens and 4 drakes.

***8/25/24**

Ducks are now capable of reproduction. Observed mating behavior outside faux pond, and not near it. Absolutely essential to collect and refrigerate all eggs from here on out, to keep current flock size.

8/26/2024

New layer! EVA. Her eggs are lighter and larger than Missy's. 1st egg is 58g! She hasn't picked a nest yet. Found this one in the creek bed.

I will continue to observe their behavior. Right now it doesn't upset them for me to take the eggs. They don't know those can be ducks. If there is a duck who gets especially attached to an egg, I will give them a faux so they will stay happy ducks. I considered doing this already, as it may encourage them to lay in the same place consistently. Because it's already August, their productivity will decrease until Spring. I am currently tracking light, weather, and lunar phase to get a good baseline rate for them. So, I don't want to 'fine tune' anything until it gets settled and all hens (or at least 4/5) produce eggs. Duck comfort note: Space is more than adequate, and they can spread out further if they need to. Final change for the duck yard this year will be additional insulation for their coop. This isn't necessary strictly speaking, but I want them to have the option.

- Water needs during Dec-Feb. remain a concern. I need to look into a warmer for their water to prevent icing over this winter. They know how to dig, so I think they might do this on their own for thin ice, but not sure yet about colder periods with more icing.